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JUDGE J. O. CUNNINGHAM.

JOSEPH OSCAR CUNNINGHAM.

1830-1917.

Joseph Oscar Cunningham was born at Lancaster in Erie County, New York, December 12, 1830, and died at his home, 922 West Green Street, Urbana, on April 30, 1917, when in his eighty-seventh year. He was a son of Hiram Way and Eunice (Brown) Cunningham. Some of his early life was spent in northern Ohio, where he attended Baldwin Institute at Berea and also Oberlin College. In June, 1853, at the age of twenty-two, he came to Champaign County, Ill., and from that time forward his home was at Urbana. He had previously taught in the village school at Eugene, Indiana, but a month after his arrival at Urbana became associated as one of the proprietors and editors of the Urbana Union. He was a member of this firm of Cunningham & Flynn until 1858, and in August of that year became associated with J. W. Scroggs in the publication of the Central Illinois Gazette at Champaign, a village then known as Western Urbana.

In April, 1855, Mr. Cunningham was admitted to the bar. In 1859 he received his law degree from the Union Law School of Cleveland, Ohio. After his admission to practice it is said he never missed a single term in court for forty-seven years. He was admitted to the Supreme Court of the United States in 1880. He was a member successively of the law firms of Sim & Cunningham, Cunningham & Weber and Cunningham & Boggs. He finally retired from active practice in 1905.

The title by which he was so long known in Champaign County was a mark of respect, though it was based actually upon official service as judge of the Champaign County

courts. He was elected to that office on an independent ticket in 1861 and served four years. At the time of his death he was the only surviving member of the original Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. He was first appointed a trustee by Governor Oglesby in 1867, and was reappointed by Governor Palmer in 1871. For six years he served as a member of its executive committee. The university always claimed much of his time and interest, and for fifty years he was its devoted friend. Another institution which claimed some of his services was McKendree College at Lebanon, Illinois, which he served as trustee during 1897-98.

Judge Cunningham was a member of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1896 and 1900. He was a member of the Mississippi Valley Historical Society and the Illinois State Historical Society. He distinguished himself by his ability as a collector and writer on historical subjects and delivered many addresses before the State Historical Society and before Masonic and legal associations. On June 27, 1900, he delivered an address at Norwalk, Ohio, before the Firelands Historical Society on the occasion of its forty-fourth annual meeting. He was one of the founders and was a director of the Illinois State Historical Society, and two of his most notable addresses were read before that society in 1902 and 1905. In collaboration with William C. Jones he prepared Jones & Cunningham's Practice, a volume on County and Probate Court Practice, the first edition of which was printed in 1883. Second and third editions were issued in 1892 and 1903. His History of Champaign County was published in 1905. After the publication of that work he continued to gather many new matters and data bearing upon the local and general history of Champaign County.

Judge Cunningham had been an active member of the Methodist Episcopal Church since 1866. A permanent monument to his memory is the result of his donation in

1894 to the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Illinois Conference of the home in which he and his wife had resided for twenty-five years. This is a large place on Cunningham Avenue, north of Urbana, and was donated to the church to be used as a home for homeless children. The building, with a tract of fifteen acres, valued at \$15,000, now has the name of the Cunningham Orphanage. The missionary society instructs and trains the children of the home.

When the Urbana Park Commission began its work of preserving beauty spots in Urbana, Judge Cunningham made the city a present of fifteen acres of land adjoining Crystal Park Lake and now comprising that portion at the north end of the park which is distinguished by a beautiful winding drive and boulevard.

Judge Cunningham was married at Bainbridge, Ohio, October 13, 1853, to Miss Mary M. McConoughey. Judge Cunningham was for a number of years master of Urbana Lodge of Masons and also a member of the Urbana Knights Templar Commandery. He began voting as a Whig, subsequently was a Republican, but from 1873 was an independent, though a pronounced advocate of the principles of the Prohibition Party.

It would be impossible within the scope of this article to describe all the interests and associations that made Judge Cunningham a part of Champaign County. In conclusion should be quoted the words of one of the local papers used at the time of his death:

"The end of a long and fruitful life, the life of a friend of the immortal Abraham Lincoln, came at 11:30 o'clock Monday night when a two weeks' illness resulted in the death of Judge J. O. Cunningham, one of the oldest and best known citizens of Champaign County.

"As Judge Cunningham had lived, so did he die, surrounded by his beloved books, a library such as none other in the State and probably in the United States. containing as it does some of the rarest old historical

works, obtainable, collected during a long life of research along historical lines. Some of the rarest volumes in the collection have to do with the life of Mr. Lincoln; who was a close friend of Mr. Cunningham in the pioneer days of Champaign County when Mr. Lincoln came to Urbana to attend the court.

"A number of years ago Judge Cunningham had a large room added to the rear of his residence as his library, and during his last illness he had his bed in this room, and at his request the last obsequies over his body were observed there.

"In the death of Judge Cunningham one of the greatest minds of the State is sealed forever. During his life scholars from many places of learning, sat at the feet of Judge Cunningham to draw from the immense storehouse of his memory details of local and State history forgotten by other minds as old as Judge Cunningham's but more feeble. Not only was he familiar with intimate bits of information regarding the life of the greatest American statesman, but he made it a part of his life to remember details of history of his home city and was able to tell many Urbana people things that they did not know about their own forebears, details that would have been lost had it not been for Judge Cunningham's interest in preserving them. Many of his recollections of days long gone are preserved in historical works compiled by him."

Judge Cunningham was one of the founders of the Illinois State Historical Society and a director from its organization in 1899 until his death. He was also honorary president of the Lincoln Circuit Marking Association and he was much interested in the plans of this organization to mark the old roads which were traversed by the lawyers of Central and Eastern Illinois in attending the sessions of the circuit courts.